
MEDICAL EXAMINER ACTIVITY

The staff members of the Medical Examiner's Office are involved in a wide variety of activities commensurate with the mission of the office including responding to and investigating the scene of death, performing postmortem examinations, certifying the cause and manner of death, and providing information and assistance to families. Investigators, who are familiar with the emotional trauma of an unexpected death, communicate directly with the family as do the Medical Examiner pathologists, who review their findings with the families in order to clarify the many questions that accompany a sudden loss of life. The office also provides referrals to grief support services.

In all cases investigated by the Medical Examiner, it is essential that the decedent's identity is established and the next-of-kin is located and notified regarding the death. In addition, property belonging to the decedent must be controlled and released according to legal requirements. In most cases these issues are resolved expeditiously. In certain cases, identification requires additional effort in locating dental, medical or police records. Some individuals may have died leaving no next-of-kin or next-of-kin far removed. Ensuring that all leads have been exhausted in pursuit of next-of-kin can be a very time consuming but ultimately rewarding effort.

The postmortem examination on each decedent includes the preservation of various body fluids and tissues for microscopic and toxicologic analysis. Photographs are taken of the external and internal portions of the examination, which are available for review at a later date if needed. Photographic documentation is also an essential item in those cases where the pathologist must provide court testimony. Forensic anthropology is another important activity necessary to resolve skeletal cases and difficult identification issues.

Medical Examiner pathologists and investigators provide testimony in court and at depositions. Staff participates in meetings with police, medical professionals, and attorneys. A recent addition to the duties of the Chief Medical Examiner is expert medical consultation and testimony in cases involving nonfatal domestic violence assaults.

Autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are provided to law enforcement agencies, to prosecuting attorneys and to many other agencies including Labor and Industries, the Drug Enforcement Administration, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Drug deaths are reported to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN).

Medical Examiner investigations require frequent contact between the Medical Examiner's Office and various media personnel. Staff are skilled in responding to the media inquiries that occur daily. The Medical Examiner pathologists and other staff participate in a variety of medical conferences, and provide information on a regular basis to law enforcement and to medical personnel on various aspects regarding the role and function of the Medical Examiner's Office.

The data collected and presented in this and other Medical Examiner annual reports also provide baseline information for further analysis. Medical Examiner staff analyzes data to study relevant death investigation topics that have applications in such fields as law enforcement, medicine, law, social sciences, and injury prevention. Examples include infant mortality, teenage suicide, child abuse, law enforcement restraint, investigation of vehicular traffic accidents, and investigation of therapeutic complication deaths. In addition, the Office participates in teaching medical students, pathology residents, emergency medical service, and law enforcement personnel.

In 2002, staff participated as speakers at universities, conferences, and training seminars for law enforcement, medical, legal, and social service personnel in the following presentations and lectures:

Richard Harruff, MD, PhD:

SERVICE

- King County Child Death Review Committee
- Washington State Child Death Review Committee
- King County Prosecuting Attorney's Elder Abuse Project
- SIDS Foundation of Washington, Executive Board
- DMORT Region 10 Member
- Jail Health Services Multidisciplinary Quality Improvement Committee
- Virginia Mason Separation and Loss Advisory Board
- University of Washington Extension Certificate Program in Forensics Advisory Board
- Washington State Coalition Against Domestic Violence, King County Coordinating Committee
- University Of Washington School of Medicine and KCMEO Continuing Medical Education Course: "Problems in Forensic Pathology"

COURSES AND TRAININGS ATTENDED

- Integrated Emergency Management Course
Emergency Management Institute, Federal Emergency Management Agency
National Emergency Training Center, April 22 – 26, Mt. Weather, VA
- Mass Fatality Conference
DMORT 10 and WSDADIT
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center, July 27 and 28, Burien WA

LECTURES AND PRESENTATIONS

- “Infant Deaths and SIDS”
Paramedic Training, Medic One Program
Harborview Medical Center, January 8, Seattle, WA
- “Investigation of Traffic Fatalities”
“Investigation of Infant Deaths”
Medicolegal Death Investigation Certification Course
Criminal Justice Training Commission
Central Washington University, January 15, Ellensburg, WA
- “Strangulation Injuries in Intimate Partner Violence”
Domestic Violence Network Meeting
King County Courthouse, January 25, Seattle, WA
- “Role of the Medical Examiner at Harborview Medical Center”
Paramedic Training Class 28
Harborview Medical Center, March 5, Seattle, WA
- “The Medical Examiner in Homicide Investigation”
Law Enforcement Basic Homicide Investigation Course
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center, March 13, Burien, WA
- “Pattern Injuries and Strangulation”
Core Training for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners
University of Washington, April 2, Seattle, WA
- “Investigation of Traffic Fatalities”
“Investigation of Infant Deaths”
Medicolegal Investigation of Death Course
University of Washington Extension's Certificate Program in Forensics
University of Washington, April 29, Seattle, WA
- “Elder Abuse and Injury Identification”
Silent Scream – Unique Abuse Investigations and Police Liability
Sponsored by the Violence against Women Act STOP Grant
Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center, June 5, Burien, WA
- “Sudden Infant Death Syndrome”
Public Health, Benton – Franklin County Health District
United Way Office Building, July 19, Richland, WA
- “Pseudosoot Pattern Mimicking a Close Range Gunshot Wound”
Raven KP, Harruff RC, Thompson E, Wyant R
Poster Presentation, National Association of Medical Examiners
36th Annual Meeting, September 30, Shreveport, LA
- “Pattern Injuries and Strangulation”
Core Training for Sexual Assault Nurse Examiners
University of Washington, October 1, Seattle, WA

- “Working with the State”
Organ Donation: Making a Lifetime Difference
Virginia Mason Medical Center, October 8, Seattle, WA
- “Occupant/Pedestrian Injuries”
Washington State Patrol Advanced Collision Course
Lynnwood Police Department, October 9, Lynnwood, WA
- “Investigation of Traffic Fatalities”
“Investigation of Infant Deaths”
Medicolegal Death Investigation Certification Course
Criminal Justice Training Commission
Central Washington University, November 19, Ellensburg, WA

PUBLICATIONS

- Kuehn CM, Taylor KM, Mann FA, Wilson AJ, Harruff RC
Validation of chest X-ray comparisons for unknown decedent identification.
Journal of Forensic Sciences, 2002 July, 47(4):725-9
- “King County Proud of its Investigative Record”
Letter to the Editor, Richard Harruff and Lois Schipper
Seattle Post-Intelligencer, November 28
- “Issues of Immigrant Cultures, Communities and the Medical Examiner's Office”
www.EthnoMed.org – Ethnic Medicine Information from Harborview Medical Center

Katherine P. Raven, M.D., Deputy Chief Medical Examiner

- “Pseudosoot Pattern Mimicking a Close Range Gunshot Wound”
National Association of Medical Examiner's National Meeting
Shreveport, LA
September 20, 2002

Alfred Noriega, Lead Death Investigator

- “The Roll and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiners Office”
Co-presentation by Alfred Noriega and Greg Hewett, Program Manager
Federal Way PD, Victim Assistance Program
At KCMEOW
Seattle, WA June 21, 2002
- “Basic Death Investigation for Law Enforcement”
Auburn PD, Patrol Officers and Sergeants
Auburn, WA July 2, 2002
- “The Roll and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiners Office”
King County Sheriffs, Student Law Enforcement Program
At KCMEOW
Seattle, WA July 24, 2002

- “The Roll and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiners Office”
Shoreline PD, Trauma Intervention Program/"TIP"
Highline Hospice
Kirkland, WA August 7, 2002
- “Basic Death Investigation for Law Enforcement”
Bellevue PD, Patrol Officers and Sergeants
Bellevue Police Department
Bellevue, WA August 9, 2002
- “The Roll and Responsibility of the King County Medical Examiners Office”
Redmond High School, Forensic Science Program
Redmond High School
Redmond, WA November 14, 2002

Katherine Taylor, PhD, Forensic Anthropologist

- “Introduction to Forensic Anthropology”
Presentation to the Seattle/King County Dental Society
KCME Office, January 23, 2002
- “Mock Expert Witness Testimony”
Presentation to the Seattle University School of Law
Seattle University, February 7, 2002
- “What Bones Say”
Presentation to the Daughters of the American Revolution
Bellevue, WA. March 13, 2002
- “Determination of Human vs. Nonhuman Bones”
Training Presentation to the King County Sheriff's Office – Maple Valley Precinct
Maple Valley, WA. April 3, 2002
- “Introduction to Forensic Anthropology”
Presentation to the Green River Community College Criminal Justice Class
Green River Community College
Seattle, WA. April 17, 2002
- “The Role of the Medical Examiner in the Community”
Presentation to the Seattle Lions Club
Seattle, WA. April 25, 2002
- “Introduction to Forensic Anthropology”
Presentation to the Crown College Criminal Justice Class
Tacoma, WA. July 30, 2002

Robinette Struckel, Autopsy Technician

- “Mass Fatality/Commercial Airline Crash Preparedness Drill”
Participation with SafeGuard 2002
Seattle/Tacoma (SeaTac) Airport
Seattle, WA. August 14, 2002

Table 12-1 **Weekly Variation of Deaths Investigated by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of cases assumed	32.36
Maximum in any one week	43
Minimum in any one week	16

Table 12-2 **Weekly Variation of Autopsies Performed by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of autopsies	22.17
Maximum in any one week	39
Minimum in any one week	13

Organization of the King County Medical Examiner Division 2002

